

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

Whatcom County Council  
**Special County Council Meeting**

July 24, 2007

Council Chair Carl Weimer called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. In the Whatcom County Courthouse, Fifth Floor Conference Room, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner  
Dan McShane  
Seth Fleetwood  
Laurie Caskey-Schreiber  
L. Ward Nelson

Absent:

Sam Crawford

1. **COUNCIL TO MEET WITH THE ADMINISTRATION TO DISCUSS WORK ASSIGNMENTS, WORK BACKLOG, PRIORITIES, ESTABLISHMENT OF MEASURABLE WORK PLANS WITH ACCOUNTABILITY BUILT IN, AND POSSIBLE MEASURES NEEDED TO EXPEDITE THIS WORK IF NECESSARY (AB2007-281A)**

Welcome, Introductions, Purpose of Council Meeting

Weimer stated the background of this issue and purpose of this meeting. This has nothing to do with criticizing the Planning staff, who does a wonderful job.

Introduction of Long Range Planning Staff

Sam Ryan, Planning and Development Services Department Interim Director, submitted an organizational chart of the long range planning staff (*on file*). There is one vacancy in long range planning for the water resource inventory area (WRIA) work. Otherwise, long range planning is staffed up.

Linda Peterson, Planning and Development Services Department, thanked everyone for being involved. Staff wants to know the Council's priorities. The Council needs to know the staff situation and workload. Many different projects and activities compete for the small number of staff. About 64 items are on the list of projects and activities. There have been a great number of changes in the long range planning division over the past several months. She has developed some organization to improve efficiency and the effectiveness of the work they do.

Each planning staff person will speak on their respective roles, priorities and projects, and main accomplishments over the past year. Their time is maximized now. Many projects are on hold due to lack of staff. Planners with project responsibilities will speak. A planner technician, a new planner I, and two geographic information system (GIS) folks will not speak today.

Ryan stated one speaker today is not listed as a full-time equivalent (FTE) employee, but is extra help, and will speak.

1  
2 Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, gave his background  
3 with Whatcom County. His role is to work on Comprehensive Plan policies, changes to  
4 development regulations, and rezones. His projects in 2006 and 2007 include the Foothills  
5 subarea plan, which has been his main project the last year. He described the project. He  
6 hopes to finish the subarea plan by early 2008. Over the last year, he's also been assigned  
7 to the six-year capital improvement program, which requires collaboration with other  
8 County departments and the County Executive's Office to formulate a plan for construction  
9 and acquisition projects over the six-year planning period. He's worked on a  
10 Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendment to require development in the outer portion of  
11 an urban growth area (UGA), to be clustered on a small part of the lot until it's rezoned and  
12 public water and sewer become available. He's also worked on a mineral resource  
13 application in Nooksack, a number of rezones in the Ferndale UGA and the Kendall area, and  
14 a variety of other miscellaneous projects.  
15

16 Caskey-Schreiber asked when the Foothills subarea plan would come forward.  
17 Aamot stated they hope to get it to the Council by the fall. It must go through the Planning  
18 Commission process first.  
19

20 Caskey-Schreiber stated a challenge is to not lose citizen involvement because of the  
21 County's lengthy processes.  
22

23 Brenner asked why Mr. Aamot was switched out of the Ferndale area. When  
24 someone has a relationship and history with an area, that's a good thing. Aamot stated  
25 that Gary Davis is now the Ferndale planner.  
26

27 Peterson stated she is trying to be more efficient with the staffing allocation by  
28 having one planner dedicated to a subarea. Because of Mr. Aamot's work on the Foothills  
29 subarea, she assigned him that subarea. At the time, Gary Davis was working on Ferndale  
30 issues and became the Ferndale subarea planner. The department has a team  
31 environment. They are not losing institutional memory. The planners talk all the time  
32 amongst each other, so information is shared.  
33

34 McShane stated the Foothills area is complex. He asked if Mr. Aamot would lean  
35 more toward getting the subarea plan right or getting it done. The Birch Bay plan took a  
36 long time, but they ended up with a good plan in the end. Patience was shown at times.  
37 The Council took its time on it, as well. Aamot stated he would rather get the plan done  
38 right. The committee wants to have a plan that the community supports. It is a lengthy  
39 process that takes time.  
40

41 McShane stated the slowness might not be due to staffing, but to the committee  
42 working through things. Aamot stated a subarea plan takes about two years to do it right.  
43 They tried to do this one quicker, but the committee is taking its time. The people want to  
44 speak and have public comment at every meeting. The committee has invested a lot into  
45 the planning effort. He would hate to see it go this far, and hurry the end to compromise  
46 the work.  
47

48 McShane asked if the six-year capital plan is done. Aamot stated it's done every two  
49 years. The next update is November 2008.  
50

51 McShane asked how much support Mr. Aamot gets from staff outside the Planning  
52 Department. Aamot stated it varies, but there is a lot of coordination and interaction with  
53 the other departments and the Executive's Office.

1  
2 Nelson asked the breakdown of Mr. Aamot's priorities and time spent. Aamot stated  
3 he spends more than 50 percent of time on the Foothills subarea. That project has been  
4 increasing. As of July, it will be close to 90 percent. Over the year, about two-thirds of his  
5 time is spent on Foothills. He spends the rest of his time with other Comprehensive Plan,  
6 zoning amendments, and miscellaneous things.  
7

8 Brenner stated Mr. Aamot is a pleasure to work with.  
9

10 Caskey-Schreiber stated Mr. Aamot is doing a good job with the Foothills subarea  
11 plan process. The community is really engaged with him. He helps keep them on track and  
12 keep the issues vetted. That helps the Council when it gets the issue. It's difficult to bring  
13 together folks with strong differing opinions. Aamot stated he appreciates the  
14 Councilmembers' involvement.  
15

16 Cathy Craver, Planning and Development Services Department, gave her background  
17 with the department. She is assigned to the Bellingham subarea. She described the  
18 subarea plan process. She helps develop the policies and write the background chapters in  
19 coordination with the City staff. She maintains the website, gets information out to the  
20 public, and works on annexations to the city of Bellingham. When she first started, she also  
21 worked on the shoreline management update. She is the planning liaison for the Inter-  
22 Jurisdictional Coordinating Team for the Lake Whatcom Management Program, which  
23 coordinates with planners and staff of other jurisdictions and departments, the water  
24 district, and the City. About 90 percent of her time is spent on the Bellingham UGA.  
25

26 McShane asked if Ms. Craver hasn't done much yet with the Lake Whatcom  
27 Management Plan, and if it's a future project. Craver stated she worked 2 1/2 years with the  
28 City on the Lake Whatcom Management Program, as a City staff person. Most of her time  
29 now is for the subarea plan.  
30

31 Gary Davis, Planning and Development Services Department, gave his background  
32 with the department. He spends about 67 percent of his time on helping Ms. Craver with  
33 the Bellingham UGA project. He also does UGA review for the small cities. He works with  
34 Ferndale and Blaine to start their UGA land supply analysis. He interacts regularly with Mr.  
35 Aamot on the Ferndale background. He is also doing Growth Management Act (GMA)  
36 compliance related to the Futurewise decision on urban residential, three units per acre (UR-  
37 3) zone in urban areas. He will work with the Birch Bay incorporation study to manage the  
38 consultants that will prepare a feasibility study for the incorporation process. He's also  
39 assigned to individual zoning changes.  
40

41 Nelson asked if the rest of his time is split amongst all the other activities. Davis  
42 stated it is.  
43

44 Caskey-Schreiber stated Ms. Craver and Mr. Davis have been very helpful in the  
45 Bellingham UGA process. Their input is welcome.  
46

47 Brenner asked if they are still determining whether Birch Bay can incorporate, and if  
48 the staff is not going help Birch Bay actually move toward incorporation. Davis described  
49 the feasibility study for incorporation.  
50

51 Brenner asked if there is a down side to doing a feasibility study totally with a  
52 consultant, to free Mr. Davis up for other things. Davis stated a consultant is helpful by

1 bringing in their special expertise. There is still a lot of time involved in managing the  
2 consultant and contract.  
3

4 John Everett, Planning and Development Services Department, stated he is the  
5 transportation planner. There is an inextricable link between the land use and capital  
6 facilities plans. His position was created a year ago to focus on those issues and other  
7 necessary public facilities and services. His position addresses those issues in three ways.  
8

9 First, his core activities include being the County liaison for transportation planning  
10 issues. He interacts regularly with other jurisdictions. There is a lot of activity related to  
11 the transportation issue. He's also the lead staff person representing transportation during  
12 project development reviews. All major land use projects being reviewed go through him  
13 for transportation review. He is involved in transportation issues within the State  
14 Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process. He is the technical administrator for the  
15 concurrency ordinance. He is assigned to the Birch Bay subarea. Transportation is the  
16 main issue out there.  
17

18 Second, he does long range coordination regarding transportation for Comprehensive  
19 Plan amendments, rezones, and UGA expansion issues.  
20

21 Third, the most important, is the concurrency impact fee program. A consultant  
22 helps him with that project. This project must not be done quickly at the expense of it  
23 being done right. Concurrency is a new program. If they don't strike the right balance for  
24 impact fees, the system could have major negative repercussions. It's critical to get the  
25 program right. He described his activities with that project. He is also working on a parks  
26 impact fee that is on hold until the parks plan can be approved and a school impact fee is  
27 done, which is in process now.  
28

29 Fleetwood asked the negative repercussions that could happen if they don't get  
30 impact fees right. Everett stated that they may not be able to invest enough into the  
31 transportation system, based on the community's level of expectation. The challenge is to  
32 accurately portray what it will actually cost the County to maintain certain levels of service.  
33 They must define the level of revenue needed to maintain the transportation system  
34 adequately.  
35

36 Nelson asked the amount of time spent on core, secondary, and tertiary activities.  
37 Everett stated it's difficult to estimate how his time is broken up. Over the next six months,  
38 he will spend 60 percent of his time on concurrency and impact fee programs.  
39

40 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*  
41

42 Weimer stated it seems like this position, more than others, is at the whim of other  
43 demands. Everett stated it is. He has a cyclical work pattern. Also, much of the  
44 concurrency impact fee program is tied to consultant work, so his work may be in a holding  
45 pattern at times, when he'll have time to work on other things.  
46

47 Caskey-Schreiber stated Hal Hart advocated for this position. Mr. Everett's work is  
48 invaluable. She asked how the Council can help him. His plate is very full. She asked if a  
49 consultant has helped, and if the staff can use another consultant in another area. Everett  
50 stated he hopes that, once they complete the concurrency and impact fee program, it will  
51 free up more of his time. Many larger urbanizing counties will have transportation planners  
52 focused on the larger long-range issues. He would like to work on long-term planning

1 issues. Once he gets the concurrency program and impact fees in place, he will have more  
2 time to work on those issues.

3  
4 Nelson asked where Mr. Everett is on the organizational chart. Everett stated he is a  
5 Senior Planner in the Planning Division.

6  
7 Nelson asked if he has a technician to work with. Everett stated he does not.

8  
9 Peterson stated there are three extra help positions, one of which is vacant. When  
10 filled, that extra help person will assist Mr. Everett.

11  
12 Brenner asked for a definition of the job descriptions of Senior Planner, Planner II,  
13 and Planner I. She thought it was based on time in the job, as well as qualifications. She  
14 asked if it's based more on qualifications. Ryan stated that when replacing a planner staff  
15 position, they hire for the specific position that's vacant. If a senior position is vacant, they  
16 hire someone qualified as a senior planner.

17  
18 Brenner asked if they can have an interim concurrency and impact fee program, until  
19 they get one right. The current interim ordinance doesn't have any teeth. Everett stated  
20 the SEPA program allows them to exact mitigation fees. He is working with individual  
21 projects on mitigation fees and mitigation projects.

22  
23 Brenner asked if SEPA is a better tool. Everett stated they are making much better  
24 use of SEPA for mitigating transportation impacts than in the past. The impact fee system  
25 makes the system more predictable. With SEPA, a developer won't know their likely  
26 mitigation requirements until they go through the SEPA process. With impact fees, people  
27 know up front what is expected of them.

28  
29 Brenner asked if they are heading in the right direction to do impact fees instead of  
30 SEPA. SEPA seems to have more flexibility. Everett stated they will ultimately use SEPA for  
31 critical safety issues and other things not addressed through the impact fee system. There  
32 may be situations where it's necessary to have an improvement made at the time of the  
33 development project due to a safety issue. Rather than just collect fees and wait for the  
34 County to make a fix, through SEPA, there may be a significant impact that needs to be  
35 addressed immediately. They'll have two tools to use.

36  
37 McShane asked if Mr. Everett's position is paid for out of the general fund.

38  
39 Dewey Desler, Deputy Administrator, stated it is.

40  
41 McShane stated the link between transportation and planning is critical. He asked if  
42 they can use the road fund to pay for Mr. Everett's position. Desler stated they've looked at  
43 that option. Road funds must be used directly for County roads. It's more appropriate to  
44 use the general fund.

45  
46 Nelson asked if the impact fees have the same restrictions, in terms of using them to  
47 pay for planning help. Desler stated the impact fees must be used for infrastructure.

48  
49 Peter Gill, Planning and Development Services Department, described his  
50 background. He is part of the natural resource policy group transferred to the long range  
51 planning division. He's worked on the critical areas ordinance and shoreline management  
52 plan. He's also working on the WRIA 1 implementation plan. He is glad the Council is  
53 prioritizing projects for the staff. Now he's working on the comprehensive water resource

1 integration project, the WRIA 1 watershed management project, Utah State University  
2 (USU) decision support system (DSS), Birch Bay watershed characterization plan, Cherry  
3 Point aquatic reserve plan, and flood plain mapping to support the critical areas ordinance,  
4 and with the Department of Ecology (DOE) to finalize the shoreline program. Most recently,  
5 the WRIA detailed implementation plan has taken up 50 percent of his time, the Birch Bay  
6 landscape characterization project is 30 percent of his time, and the other projects take up  
7 the last 30 percent of his time.

8  
9 Brenner stated Mr. Gill is amazing with the Birch Bay folks. He has a great way with  
10 people. She asked if he hopes that they will get USU deliverables. Gill stated he does.  
11 There is encouraging activity happening.

12  
13 Brenner asked if he trusts the material that USU sends over. Gill stated that remains  
14 to be seen.

15  
16 Brenner stated she would like to know which of his activities should be the highest  
17 priority. She wants to ask how Mr. Gill would like to see his workload prioritized. He's been  
18 around awhile and has observed the issues. Private firms can do things like flood plain  
19 mapping. Gill stated a consultant would take the new elevation data that the County just  
20 received from U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and do the same thing the County is doing.  
21 The County has needs for the information. It's an improvement on the Federal Emergency  
22 Management Agency (FEMA) maps.

23  
24 Caskey-Schreiber stated she likes the idea of asking staff what they can do and what  
25 is important. She asked Mr. Gill's opinion of the top two areas that they should prioritize.  
26 Gill stated focus on what they are already deeply involved in and for which they have a lot  
27 of citizen support, before dropping them off the list.

28  
29 Caskey-Schreiber stated that is Birch Bay and WRIA. She feels like the flood plain  
30 thing is coming forward without a lot of updated information. The Council is being asked to  
31 repair a dike that seems to have a negative effect to the opposite side of the river. A  
32 question is how much more money the County should spend in that one area without  
33 considering what else is going on. Gill stated that the Flood Division is mostly working on  
34 that project. He is helping them figure out how best to do the mapping.

35  
36 Nelson stated he would like the Planning Manager to give the Council thoughts on  
37 their perspective. Peterson stated the team has gone through several exercises regarding  
38 their projects and activities, including both active projects and projects on hold.

39  
40 Caskey-Schreiber stated she wants input from the staff also.

41  
42 Samya Lutz, Planning and Development Services Department, gave her background.  
43 She works on the ongoing affordable housing project through the Countywide Housing  
44 Affordability Task Force. She described the affordable housing project. She also worked on  
45 Birch Bay design guidelines for commercial development, which recently ended. She  
46 described that project. Now, she assists Senior Planner Kraig Olason with the agricultural  
47 program, particularly the purchase of development rights (PDR) portion of the program.

48  
49 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the Birch Bay design guidelines will be formally adopted or  
50 a covenant. Lutz stated implementation is on hold. They completed the consultant portion  
51 of the project. The consultant's deliverable was a proposed design guidelines document,  
52 but it has not gone through public processes through the Planning Commission and Council.

1 Caskey-Schreiber asked how long that would take. Peterson stated there was a  
2 decision to put that on hold because of the incorporation study. If Birch Bay goes forward  
3 with incorporation, it's more reasonable that the city come up with its own design  
4 guidelines.

5  
6 Caskey-Schreiber stated she is concerned about projects that are moving along and  
7 won't have any guidelines to follow. Peterson stated the Birch Bay incorporation process  
8 could be completed before they adopt the guideline, anyway.

9  
10 Brenner stated the Birch Bay design guideline process actively involved the  
11 community. She asked if they can take that draft and adopt it as an interim. Incorporation  
12 will take a long time if the community goes forward with incorporation. Peterson stated  
13 they haven't thought about doing an interim. They needed to shift staff to other resources.

14  
15 Weimer stated the draft is a guideline, and is not ready to put into code.

16  
17 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they could increase Ms. Lutz to a vacant planner II  
18 position. Ryan stated the vacant position is for WRIA, not long range planning.

19  
20 Brenner stated Ms. Lutz wants to work part-time.

21  
22 Elizabeth Olsen, Planning and Development Services Department, described her  
23 background. She has gone through eight of the existing subareas from the beginning. She  
24 knows why things were done and their effects on planning at that time. Now, her work is  
25 on zoning and Comprehensive Plan amendments and the very basic mandates such as the  
26 Open Space program. She described the Open Space program and her responsibilities. She  
27 also works on changes to the Coordinated Water Plan and annexations.

28  
29 Nelson asked how Ms. Olsen allocates her time. Olsen stated that to the end of the  
30 year, she has a Planner I to work with her on mandated projects.

31  
32 Brenner stated it's a pleasure working with Ms. Olsen. She's very helpful and easy to  
33 get a hold of.

34  
35 Jim Thompson, Planning and Development Services Department, gave his  
36 background. He is with the long-range natural resources policy planning group working on  
37 the water resources integration project. Over the next 18 months, he will spend 30 percent  
38 of his time doing WRIA implementation and management, 30 percent on the conservation  
39 plan for agricultural lands, which is an element of the critical areas ordinance, and more  
40 time on perfecting some of the forest conversion regulations mandated by the end of 2008.  
41 The remaining percentage will be spent on the water resource integration project, the  
42 Cherry Point aquatic reserve, developing critical areas and shoreline guideline technical  
43 materials to apply the guides consistently, and the critical areas ordinance amendment  
44 cycle. Parallel with water resource integration and working strategy documents, they are  
45 working toward natural resource integration, not just water resource integration. The  
46 critical areas ordinance and shorelines are two elements of an advanced strategy. In  
47 moving from land use to natural resource policy, his purpose is to work on the  
48 implementation elements.

49  
50 Fleetwood asked for more information on the forest practice conversion rules. He  
51 also asked the key feature of the detailed implementation plan. Thompson explained the  
52 State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) forest conversion changes. Regarding the

1 implementation plan, WRIA is an advanced process that he's still learning about. At this  
2 time, he's not sure he can identify a key feature.

3  
4 McShane stated it's a good idea to have someone like Mr. Thompson, who has been  
5 working with the regulations on the ground, in this position. Identify those issues where the  
6 staff and public end up spinning their wheels.

7  
8 Peterson read information from Senior Planner Kraig Olason, who couldn't be here  
9 today. Mr. Olason has a very important role. He is assigned to agricultural programs, the  
10 Lynden subarea, the ten-year review for the UGA's for Lynden, Sumas, Everson, and  
11 Nooksack. She read his statement describing his agricultural program activities.

12  
13 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side B.)*

14  
15 Brenner stated the Council funded a permanent assistant for Mr. Olason. She asked  
16 why the administration didn't fund it as a permanent position. Ryan stated that position  
17 was funded to June 30 of this year.

18  
19 Brenner stated the Council and the administration need to work together. The  
20 Council prioritized agriculture as one of the top priorities.

21  
22 Desler stated he'd have to look at the record to see what happened to that position.  
23 He remembers additional staff capacity added to the budget. The agricultural program  
24 coming forward includes a consulting team and staff assistance. He's not sure if that  
25 assistance is permanent.

26  
27 *(Clerk's Note: The Council took a break from 10:53 a.m. to 11:09 a.m.)*

28  
29 Review of Long Range Projects and Activities – 2007

30  
31 Brenner stated some of the core activities don't seem to be long range. It's  
32 confusing. Some things like SEPA review and annexations aren't long-range activities as  
33 much as they are regular administrative things. Ryan stated part of that is correct. Long  
34 range planning responds to the SEPA decisions being put out. Before, the department  
35 wasn't contributing its input. Now, that is happening.

36  
37 Brenner stated that Mr. Everett's position includes long-, medium-, and short-range  
38 projects. That has a tendency to divert their focus to short-term projects and away from  
39 long-term projects.

40  
41 Weimer stated one of the core functions is making sure there is integration among  
42 the different pieces of the puzzle.

43  
44 Petersen stated it's hard to differentiate between long-range and current projects.  
45 On the list are long-range planners working on long-range projects and looking at long-  
46 range issues. She summarized the July 24, 2007 version of the Long Range Planning  
47 Division Projects and Activities for 2007 *(on file)*.

48  
49 Brenner asked if Futurewise compliance requires one FTE per year. Davis stated the  
50 Futurewise case involves densities that aren't dense enough in the urban areas, which  
51 they've taken care of. It is also about densities outside rural areas that are too dense.  
52 Third, it is about Comprehensive Plan designations that are not in accordance with limited  
53 areas of more intense rural development (LAMIRD's). The project requires a lot of

1 Comprehensive Plan text amendments and changes to many Comprehensive Plan  
2 designations to comply. It also requires much public interaction to explain the changes to  
3 the public.  
4

5 Brenner stated they are doing that anyway. She asked why they are assigning one  
6 FTE for the year. The County may not do those things as quickly as Futurewise wants, but  
7 they are moving forward. Davis stated they are still awaiting a decision from the Court of  
8 Appeals. If the County gets the word from the court that it needs to do these things, the  
9 staff anticipates having many public meetings all over the county.  
10

11 Caskey-Schreiber stated it's evident that the County doesn't have enough staff to  
12 complete some of these tasks. Rather than nit-picking which tasks are more important and  
13 which are mandated, add staff, contract out, or transfer staff from the permit division.  
14 Borrow three people from the permit area to work on the low priority items for a year.  
15 Ryan stated all the vacancies in the department are in the permit division. Those people  
16 need to be trained. If they borrow any more staff, then they will slow or stop the permitting  
17 process.  
18

19 Caskey-Schreiber stated the other option is to add more staff or consultants. A  
20 problem with hiring is getting those people hired and trained.  
21

22 Weimer asked if there are timelines on the legally mandated items. Peterson stated  
23 she's indicated any deadlines on the list. The others are more vague in terms of a deadline.  
24

25 Weimer asked if legal mandates have to be at the top of the priority list. Peterson  
26 stated that in an ideal world, they do.  
27

28 Weimer stated there isn't enough staff to do more than what's legally mandated.  
29 Peterson stated it's more important to complete the non-mandated items on which they've  
30 invested a great amount of time and resources. She would not divert staff from that to a  
31 mandated item with no deadline. Keep the continuity.  
32

33 Brenner stated consultants could work on some of these activities. Former County  
34 staff people with backgrounds in these items are working for local consulting firms. Some  
35 projects are small and can be done quickly, and others are big long-term projects. Use  
36 consultants that have worked in the County in the past so they don't have to be brought up  
37 to speed. Go through the list and identify those things that can be done with consultants  
38 who are former employees. Ryan stated those consultants have to be budgeted.  
39

40 Fleetwood asked what a budget appropriation would need to be if they were to hire  
41 to fill these gaps. Ryan stated they didn't have the time to put together a fiscal impact.  
42

43 Nelson asked if projects that have received other funding get preferential treatment.  
44 Peterson stated there are strings attached to grants, and grants are difficult to administer.  
45 It's difficult to secure a grant. They have to really decide whether a grant is worthwhile.  
46

47 Nelson asked about other agency involvement to work on some of these projects.  
48 Peterson stated that can include a State agency, another city, or other jurisdictions. Most  
49 projects have interagency and extended public involvement, such as one or more  
50 community meetings.  
51

52 Nelson asked the impact to these projects from Planning Commission involvement.  
53 Peterson stated that the impact is to staff time required to process the project.

1  
2 Weimer asked if County law or State law requires items to go through the Planning  
3 Commission. Aamot stated Planning Commission involvement is required by State law.  
4

5 Brenner stated the community impact assessment item is about requiring a cost-  
6 benefit analysis on commercial development in excess of 80,000 square feet. However, the  
7 Council adopted an ordinance about commercial development being no larger than 75,000  
8 square feet. She asked why that item is on the list.  
9

10 Fleetwood stated he filed that item a year ago.

11  
12 Brenner stated some of the projects on this list are outdated.

13  
14 Weimer stated the Council adopted this limitation as an interim.  
15

16 McShane stated the Planning Department has a history in the county. The GMA has  
17 had significant impacts on how business is done in every county. Every county is struggling  
18 with this. This has been hard for the County Council because it is a part-time Council.  
19 Their workload has gone up a lot. They haven't responded with the staffing levels that the  
20 GMA requires, partly because they didn't anticipate how enormous the issues would be.  
21 Those problems aren't going to go away. Because of the nature of Whatcom County, they  
22 want to move beyond GMA compliance, such as with the agricultural program. They must  
23 have a robust process. It will come down to deciding whether or not the County should set  
24 a budget and ramp up long-term planning. The Council has started to ramp up by hiring  
25 the Council policy analyst. That's where they are getting to, and that's what they need to  
26 talk about. Not included on this list are all the action items in the Comprehensive Plan.  
27

28 Weimer stated they don't have enough staff to get through the legal mandates.  
29 Spend time talking about ramping up with the administration.  
30

31 Fleetwood stated he agrees. There seems to be a Council consensus that they need  
32 more. Long-term planning is necessary for implementing the best vision for the county.  
33 Because something is a mandate doesn't mean it's a high priority to local values. The  
34 County's values are equally important. He supports hiring more staff, even if it takes more  
35 money.  
36

37 Brenner stated they can have more staff, but the current staff members have been  
38 leaving. People are coming on board, getting trained, and leaving. Long-term staff have  
39 also left. There is a combination of problems. Just ramping up is not going to do it. They  
40 need more staff even if no one had left. There are two issues to deal with. In addition to  
41 budgeting for more staff, they must also preserve institutional memory.  
42

43 Olsen stated the long-range Planning Division shouldn't be mixed up with the  
44 Building and Land Use Divisions. Only one long-range planner has left.  
45

46 Brenner stated Jeff Chalfant was a long-range planner.  
47

48 Caskey-Schreiber stated there are more tasks than staff available to do those tasks.  
49 That won't change. She is in favor of hiring staff over hiring consultants. Do a budget  
50 amendment. The administration should figure out what they need, and the Council will  
51 support it. Some of the staff may have left because they were over-burdened. That's  
52 everyone's fault. Solve the problem. Add the people they need.  
53

1 Nelson stated that if they are going to add staff, the Council must also be responsible  
2 to the citizens in terms of cost and how long it will take. They must address the mandates  
3 and the local projects that are in process. When they have things proposed by legislative  
4 action or otherwise, it would be good to put a timeframe in place. When they start seeing  
5 these problems occur, they can do an analysis and make sure they are meeting the  
6 demands being placed upon the department. Consider that for the future. Additional  
7 workloads add stress to the staff. There are things they can do to accommodate that. They  
8 may need additional staff to get this going.  
9

10 The question is how to look at their needs for the future. Impacts from legislative  
11 decisions and mandates never came forward in the budget process. They need that  
12 information. Peterson stated this information should have been provided a long time ago.  
13 This information will change as the situation changes. From this, they can build a better  
14 basis for making staff determinations, staff requests, and budget requests. Also, fiscal  
15 notes will be included with ordinances and other things that come forward.  
16

17 Pete Kremen, County Executive, stated he thanks everyone for this dialog. It's  
18 productive for everyone. The administration does need to ramp up. It has begun to ramp  
19 up, in spite of the perception. The long-range Planning Division has more people than it did  
20 a few years ago.  
21

22 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape two, side A.)*  
23

24 Kremen continued to state that these comments are extremely valid and  
25 appropriate. From his perspective, allocating more resources and creating positions doesn't  
26 mean they are going to be able to hire anyone. There is a lot of competition in this  
27 Northwest region for this expertise. There is a reason why private businesses are recruiting  
28 out of the County and City jurisdictions. There is a dearth of skilled people in this industry.  
29 It will be tough to fill those positions. They don't want to hire just anyone. They need the  
30 right person with the right skills and the right fit. The County will do the best job it can.  
31 It's a very competitive market. Whatcom County will be more aggressive in it's recruitment  
32 and retention efforts.  
33

34 Weimer stated the councilmembers can do their prioritizations later and turn them  
35 in.  
36

37 Brenner stated identify which projects can be done with consultants. Have three  
38 categories that include the long-term staff projects, the short-term staff projects, and  
39 consultant projects.  
40

41 Fleetwood stated that if the Council agrees that everything on the list is important, it  
42 doesn't need to go through the prioritization activity.  
43

44 **Caskey-Schreiber** stated the Council already determined that these are high  
45 priority items. She wants to know how much they can do with more higher-level planner  
46 positions. Then, prioritize what kind of people they add versus hiring consultants. She  
47 **moved** to ask the administration to come back with options for sending out some projects  
48 to consultants, make recommendations for increasing staff levels, and estimate costs.  
49

50 McShane stated he doesn't want to micro-manage at this point. The Council is  
51 willing to support increasing capacity of the department on some level. Consultants are  
52 expensive, not often good, and take governments for a ride. He's cautious about them.  
53 However, there are specific issues on which the County has done a good job using

1 consultants on specific issues that don't require staff for the long term. Those are the  
2 things that should be assigned to consultants. Don't use consultants to take over things the  
3 County should normally do on a regular basis.

4  
5 Ryan stated they must also consider space needs for additional staff.

6  
7 Brenner stated she disagrees with Councilmember McShane. Most consultants, other  
8 than USU, have been good. Most have done excellent work. She's only talking about  
9 having consultants for one-time projects, not ongoing activities. Her priority is low-impact  
10 development.

11  
12 McShane stated he is afraid of using consultants for low-impact development.

13  
14 Kremen stated the Council and County needs to prioritize, regardless of whether or  
15 not they ramp up. Staff needs to know what to focus on while they try to find people to fill  
16 the positions they create. Doing that right now is premature. Digest this list. Keep the list  
17 for a week, and the administration will come up with more options, per the motion.

18  
19 **Nelson** stated that is what the motion implies. They need to work more on  
20 prioritization. There is more work than what the staff can do in a reasonable amount of  
21 time. They need to look at the alternatives available from an administrative perspective.  
22 He **restated the motion** to request the administration to work with its staff to define the  
23 options. Adding staff isn't always the answer. There may be impacts to implementation if  
24 they move faster on planning.

25  
26 **Caskey-Schreiber concurred** with Councilmember Nelson's clarification of the  
27 motion.

28  
29 **Motion carried unanimously.**

30  
31  
32 **OTHER BUSINESS**

33  
34 There was no other business.

35  
36  
37 **ADJOURN**

38  
39 The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

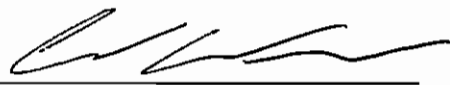
40  
41   
42 \_\_\_\_\_  
43 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

44  
45 The Council approved these minutes on September 25 2007.

46  
47 ATTACHED

48 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
49 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

50  
51   
52 \_\_\_\_\_  
53 Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

54  
55   
56 \_\_\_\_\_  
57 Carl Weimer, Council Chair